

Lyn Valley Mission Community

Christ the King

Please read through these passages slowly and reflectively before reading my sermon.

Ezekiel: 34:11-16, 20-24 Ps 95:1-7 Ephesians 1:15-end

Matthew 25:31-end

In writing and reading, speaking and listening, may God be known, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

On this the final Sunday of the Church Year we come to the feast of Christ the King: a yearly reminder that no matter what we are living through, however things feel, our faith teaches that all things come under God's reign in Christ. This is a cause for trust and for renewal of our hope, rooted in the love God has for the whole Creation.

It is also a yearly reminder that if Christ is our King we are being offered a distinctive way to look at what a King is, how true power is exercised and what our role is as those who live under Jesus' rule, who serve this King. It is all too easy to drift, and I think historically this drift can happen in the church as a whole, into applying worldly ideas about kingship to the way we think about Christ as King, rather than allowing Jesus' life death and resurrection to show us what true Kingship is. We need to start by looking at Jesus to show us what distinctive things he is teaching us about power and glory and leadership and sovereignty. That is particularly important in the noisy world of conflict politics we now find ourselves within.

When we look at Jesus what do we see? A child born in obscurity and at some risk – the gospels show him born in an animal's cave far from home, or hurried into Egypt as a refugee, dependent of the generosity of strangers for his earliest survival; one who would know hunger and thirst as he resisted the devil's routes to power in the desert, at a well side with a foreign woman, and high on the cross, an itinerant preacher depending on the wealth of a group of women who supported him and the hospitality of friends "the

son of man has nowhere to lay his head", one who was arrested, held, abused in custody, stripped of even his clothes before being crucified; and one who was carried through death by God and resurrected to offer eternal life to all: the victory, the power and the glory which is his and which he calls us to share. The victory, the power and the glory of God's love reaching into every vulnerable and frightening place in human existence to draw from those places something new, and truly triumphant.

In today's evocative parable then, Jesus is not just being poetic when he fully identifies himself with those who are hungry, thirsty, who are strangers, naked, sick or in prison. He has been each of those people in his earthly life – this is what he actually lived through. Sometimes people wonder what it would be like if Jesus had come now – it is a question for imagination rather than logic, but it is not too hard to apply that list and wonder if we would recognise our King, the one we are called to serve, in the one who is short of food and drink or clothes, is the outsider, the prisoner, the one who is ill.

Worldly ideas of kingship, power and success make this an uncomfortable thought. Rulers are not supposed to be vulnerable, deep down we want them to make us winners, to make sure we are secure, that we are not the people on Jesus' list. Those Jesus talks of are experiencing the frightening places of human society that many will want to push away from thought.

Yet, these are those who Jesus calls his family. Indeed some interpretations of this parable suggest that the term "the least of these" is one he often uses of his closest followers. In the early years of the Church, it may well have been more natural for Christians to identify with those being served in this parable than with the sheep and goats being judged. In the church today across the world there will be people and places in which this is also true – where following Jesus brings much closer identification with the life he actually lived through his ministry, where following Jesus is about being with him in the most frightening places of human societies.

As we listen to the parable today perhaps it asks each of us where we are in it today and helps us to think about where we would like to be in it, and offers us the opportunity to ask God for the grace to recognise and respond to Christ our King wherever we find ourselves.

Are we actually one of the vulnerable ones – struggling with basic needs, suffering hidden or obvious challenges in life, in need of compassion? Can we hear Jesus refer to us as his family? Can we recognise that our needs are his needs too – when we seek help we offer others a chance to meet Jesus in us?

Do we notice this parable triggering our own fear of vulnerability? Can we ask Jesus to meet us in all that we fear and help us to understand his kind of loving kingship even in the things that we are afraid of? Can we let his love cast out our fear?

Are there undramatic ways in our own environment in which we can offer our love to those who share Jesus' life in practical circumstances they would not choose – can we be part of the new life Jesus offers us all in our care for them?

Can we now ask for the grace of God to work in us so deeply that we are amongst those who are surprised to hear that we have been serving Christ in those around us – because we have just become so fully a part of the Kingdom whose fulfilment we long for, that finding the places where love can transform fear, and life can overcome death is the heart of the way that we live?

Whatever the parable inspires us to ask, let us pray:

God our Father, help us to hear the call of Christ the King and to follow in his service, whose kingdom has no end, for he reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, one glory, Amen.

